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Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 370th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 26 January 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHAN

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report of the Czech Republic (continued) (CEDAW/C/CZE/1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Hejna and Ms. Jerabkova (Czech Republic) took places at the Committee table.

Article 10

2. Ms. FERRER, referring to paragraph 135 of the report, asked which institutions, in addition to military schools, admitted only men for certain types of study, and why girls were not admitted.

3. Ms. AOUIJ said that it was commendable that, shortly after its establishment, the Czech Republic had notified the Secretary-General of its intention to be bound by the Convention.

4. In the sphere of education, the dominant themes seemed to be the family, the role of parents and their relations with their children. She asked whether women were presented in textbooks not just as mothers but as full-fledged citizens who made contributions in the political, economic and social fields. Was the Convention studied in schools at the primary, secondary and higher levels?

5. The six household economy schools which had been established for girls (para. 139) were a form of overt discrimination against girls and were likely to lead to an accentuation of female stereotypes; why was it not possible for boys to attend those schools?

6. Noting that an overwhelming majority of teachers were women (82 per cent at the primary level and 60 per cent at the secondary level) (para. 140), she said that the feminization of education inevitably led to reduced pay and made teaching careers less attractive to men. What percentage of principals in primary and secondary schools were women? Why were girls not going into technical education? In most developed and developing countries, great efforts were being made to encourage girls to undertake studies in science and technology, since that was essential for the progress and development of society; girls in the Czech Republic were therefore in an anachronistic situation compared with the rest of the world. She asked what steps were being taken by the Government in that regard, and how the recommendations of international conferences, especially the Fourth World Conference on Women, were being implemented in the Czech Republic, especially the recommendations concerning equality in education as the basis for the advancement of women, so that girls had the same opportunities as boys.

7. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that it appeared that girls in the Czech Republic tended to go into traditional areas such as nursing and social work, rather than

non-traditional areas such as science. The Government might consider establishing special scholarships to encourage girls to enter careers in science and technology. Information and awareness campaigns were also needed, both for young people and for their parents.

Article 11

8. Ms. FERRER, referring to paragraph 146, asked whether average wages for women were still lower than those for men, particularly in view of the difficulties experienced by women during the transition to a market economy. Had the Government designed policies and programmes to help reduce those obvious inequalities? What was it doing to change gender stereotypes, which impaired women's ability to develop within society and contribute to the economy?

9. She requested further information on the new system of social benefits and services mentioned in paragraph 150. The obligation of employment offices to pay attention to job placement for unemployed persons who were difficult to place, including pregnant women and women with family responsibilities, had been mentioned in the oral presentation; she asked whether the law envisaged any penalties for employers who did not hire women in such categories.

10. Ms. GONZALEZ said that one of the most important ways of achieving the full advancement of women was to encourage their involvement in all economic activities, and to ensure that they enjoyed equal opportunities and equal access to employment and social benefits. The report provided no data on which branches of the economy women were involved in; to what extent did women participate in industrial activities and in the service sector, for example, and what proportion were workers, technicians and managers? What was their level of participation compared with men?

11. Referring to paragraph 148, she asked why there was a difference between widow's and widower's pensions, and for how long a widow's pension was payable; was it only when a spouse had his/her own pension that he/she was eligible for a widower's/widow's pension?

12. Ms. HARTONO, referring to paragraph 147, requested clarification as to why the pensionable age was different for men and women, and for childless women and women with children. That regulation could mean that only childless women would have access to the highest decision-making positions. How had the pensionable ages of 53 and 57 been determined?

13. With regard to Decree No. 261/97 specifying which jobs and workplaces were prohibited to women, she asked which jobs were prohibited and whether they were closed to all women or only to certain categories of women, such as pregnant women and women with small children.

Article 12

14. Ms. ABAKA said that the very low maternal mortality rate was a positive factor. She requested a breakdown of the major causes of maternal mortality and morbidity, especially in the light of the very high rates of induced abortion. She asked whether women who were hospitalized after an induced abortion were

discriminated against or received prompt treatment. She requested information on the average number of abortions per woman of childbearing age, particularly in view of the adverse consequences of frequent abortions on women's physical and mental health and the danger that abortion might be regarded as a method of contraception.

15. She asked whether the low level of contraceptive use was linked to a perception of women primarily as mothers. What was the average number of children per woman? Why was the abortion rate so high when contraceptives were readily available? How many women worked in the health care sector, in what areas, and at what level of seniority?

16. Referring to table 8 (para. 140), she asked whether there were any programmes to encourage girls to study science with a view to becoming doctors and pharmacists; in that capacity, they might be able to convince women to use contraception rather than undergo repeated abortions. Were students in medical and paramedical schools given human rights education? Did members of law enforcement agencies receive such education? Were women whose rights had been violated entitled to confidentiality and decent treatment?

17. Ms. SHALEV expressed alarm about the possible link between the low level of contraceptive use and the high incidence of induced abortion. Since 97 per cent of nursing school students were female, she wondered whether women also constituted a high proportion of the health-care personnel who, according to paragraph 178 of the report, lacked knowledge about contraceptives. It would be useful to know whether the Czech Government had conducted information campaigns about contraception for women, girls and, in particular, health-care professionals, who should be counselling women about contraceptive methods and the choices available to them. The telephone counselling centre for family planning, described by the Czech delegation in introducing the initial report, seemed wholly inadequate in that regard. The delegation should elaborate on the statement in paragraph 215 of the report that the cost of contraceptives was partly covered by general health insurance. It would be interesting to know whether fuller coverage was provided for abortions.

18. The report contained no information on infertility treatment. She would appreciate an indication of which methods were in use, their cost and the extent of their coverage by the health insurance scheme. Did women receive counselling and were they able to exercise choice in the matter?

19. The report also failed to address aspects of women's health unrelated to reproduction. Even the projects described in the oral presentation, such as the studies on women and smoking and on women's mental health, focused exclusively on women's childbearing and nursing functions. There was no information on causes of female morbidity other than those related to reproduction. A differentiation between the causes of male and female morbidity would also be valuable. She wished to know about services for elderly women, particularly in view of women's longevity in the Czech Republic, and about substance abuse programmes for women; the delegation should provide information on patterns of substance abuse among both men and women.

20. She inquired about the rise in the incidence of syphilis among men and women (para. 105, table 1). The delegation should provide more information on the disease's pattern of infection and on whether the situation had stabilized. She asked whether the pregnant women referred to in paragraph 172 had given their express consent to testing for HIV/AIDS or whether such testing was routine. She would also appreciate an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of such screening, given the low incidence of HIV/AIDS in the Czech Republic. A comparison of the resources allocated for such screening and those allocated for the distribution of contraceptives would be extremely interesting.

21. Ms. GONZALEZ echoed Ms. Abaka's and Ms. Shalev's concern about the number of induced abortions, which was almost as high as the number of live births. She would appreciate information on any programmes designed to discourage unwanted pregnancies among adolescents. The representatives of the Czech Republic should also provide a breakdown of induced abortions by age group.

22. She, too, would appreciate more information on female mortality and morbidity and on the general health situation of women, including their nutritional status. What types of facilities were available to women, throughout the national territory, for the treatment of diseases unrelated to reproduction? It would be interesting to know whether the Czech Republic was facing problems of adolescent drug use, including marijuana use, and addiction.

Article 13

23. Ms. FERRER asked whether Czech cultural institutions planned to teach skills other than the traditionally female ones enumerated in paragraph 192, in order to be more responsive to women's "interests and needs" in a genuinely egalitarian society.

Article 14

24. Ms. OUEDRAOGO expressed disappointment at the scant information on rural women and, in particular, at the assertion that discrimination between rural men and women did not exist (para. 196). That assertion seemed to contradict the statistics provided elsewhere in the report, particularly those on education. It was also surprising, since the elimination of stereotypes, including those with regard to the division of household chores, generally lagged behind in rural areas. She would therefore appreciate more specific information on the social, economic and cultural life of rural women.

Article 16

25. Ms. ACAR inquired about the relationship between the extremely high rate of divorce in the Czech Republic and Czech society's emphasis on family values. She would appreciate information on the status of de facto unions, which she presumed were fairly prevalent in a country with a divorce rate of 38 per cent. The delegation should describe the legal protection afforded to a woman upon the dissolution of a de facto union or in the event of her partner's death, particularly with regard to the custody of children, maintenance, contributions and property settlement.

26. Referring to paragraph 207, she inquired about possible alternatives to the institution of joint estate of spouses. The exclusion from the joint estate of "objects necessary for the exercise of the profession of only one of the spouses" could be discriminatory towards women, for example, in cases where huge sums of money had been invested in professional premises. More information would be appreciated in that regard.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.